

Stein's Understanding of Mental Health and Mental Illness

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Abstract This chapter discusses Stein's understanding of mental health and mental illness in order to contribute to phenomenologically determine the formal object of psychiatry. It first outlines and defends Stein's understanding of the psyche as an element of psycho-physical beings constituted from experiences marked by life power. Then it highlights three functions of the psychic mechanism that support mental health and which are affected in mental illness: vitality, rationality and trust. Finally the various ways in which psychic contagion can instigate and aggravate mental illness are discussed. It is argued that psychic causality is causing both the disturbances studied by psychiatry and the state of equilibrium its range of healing practices pursue and that thus the dysfunctional psyche, i.e. the psyche that does not support meaningful experiencing, is the formal object of psychiatry.

In her *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities* Edith Stein attempts to phenomenologically identify (constitute) the specific objects studied respectively by the sciences of psychology and the humanities.¹ As a student of Husserl and the editor of his *Ideas II* and *III*, she had made her own Husserl's radical project of phenomenologically founding the sciences. The fact that she wrote her dissertation immediately after having resigned as his assistant indicates that she thought his attempt to outline the ontological regions concerned with the human being remained in need of revision or completion. Stein had left Breslau to study phenomenology with Husserl because she thought psychology was still in need of having its

¹The German title *Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung der Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften* is literally translated as 'contributions towards the philosophical foundation of psychology and the humanities'. The work will be referred to in the following as PPH. The foreword starts: 'The following investigations undertake to penetrate into the essence of sentient reality and of the mind from various sides, and thereby to secure the groundwork for a definition of psychology and the humanities that will fit the facts.' CWES 7, 2000, 1. An earlier version of this paper has been published in German in M. Lebech and H.-B. Gerl-Falkovitz, 2017, under the title: 'Psychische Gesundheit und Krankheit bei Edith Stein', pp. 188–202.

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fundamental concepts clarified, and because she hoped phenomenology could accomplish that. In her later 'Die Typen der Psychologie und ihre Bedeutung für die Pädagogik' (ESGA 16: 9–14)² she distinguishes three types of psychology: metaphysical or rational, empirical (descriptive, explanatory, understanding and classificatory) and practical knowledge of character, all of which rely on the phenomenological clarification of the specific object of psychology as the key to their coherence. In *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, she realises the ambition to provide psychology with that for the lack of which she had abandoned its study: an analysis of its formal object. Her work has not yet, however, had much influence on mainstream psychology.³

The fundamental claim of Stein's treatise is that the psyche is constituted in or identified from those experiences in which life-power plays a role, as that which accounts for the fact that our experiences seem to use up energy and be energised in various ways.⁴ The phenomenon of life power waxing and waning manifests experiential or psychic causality, distinct from physical causality by the fact that it is experienced in and as a feature of the experiences themselves.⁵ The psyche is like a battery, the energy of which is being used up in experience and recharged through rest.

Stein does not at length address the question of mental illness. In her description of the psyche, however, phenomena related to mental illness are often discussed. Here, we shall argue for the plausibility of her understanding of the psyche and build on it to clarify what can be understood by psychic illness in so far as this understanding of the psyche is approximately correct.

The fact that Stein describes the constitution of the psyche in great detail is a practice that implies that our intelligible experience is the implicit reason for identifying psychic experience at all, and thus the implicit norm for its being healthy. It seems in fact that this practice lies at the heart of all psychology. From it we can deduce that being mentally healthy is being in a psychological condition that allows

²References are given to the *Edith Stein Gesamtausgabe* (ESGA) and to the *Collected Works of Edith Stein* (CWES). If two sets of page numbers are given, the page numbers in square brackets refer to the German text of Edith Stein Gesamtausgabe (ESGA). Other abbreviations used:

PE = *On the Problem of Empathy*, trans. by W. Stein, 3rd revised edition. Dordrecht: Springer 1989.

PPH = *Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities*, translated by M. C. Baseheart and M. Sawicki. Washington, DC: ICS Publications 2000.

³For some studies see A. Ales Bello 2003, 2007 and 2010, Meneses and Larkin 2012, M. Lebeck 2004, C. Betchart 2009 and 2010, A. Togni 2016.

⁴*Beiträge zur philosophischen Begründung des Psychologie und der Geisteswissenschaften/Philosophy of Psychology and the Humanities I: Psychische Kausalität/Psychic Causality*.

⁵Stein in fact claims that psychic causality is experientially prior to physical causality, and that the latter in its identification therefore is dependent on the former (PPH: 3–6). An assessment of this and of its significant consequences would be a topic for another paper. For our purposes we note that an understanding of psychic events as being caused by physical causality depends on the understanding of the role psychic causality plays in them: it is not possible to attribute a physical cause to a psychic event without identifying the psychic event as such. The analysis of the phenomenon of psychic causality with which Stein is concerned can thus not be dispensed with either by a naturalist psychology and psychiatry.

for our experiences to be experienced as meaningful.⁶ By implication, the psychic phenomena are not all immediately experienced to be meaningful. They are occurrences experienced in our experiencing itself, which would not occur to a purely spiritual person (e.g. an angel), such as being tired, being tired of something, being intoxicated, infatuated, feeling sensual pleasure, pain or sexual attraction, being ill, hungry, confused, emotionally wrought, traumatised, sluggish, over-stimulated, dreaming, sleeping, hallucinating or suppressing feelings and thoughts.

On Stein's understanding of the psyche, the mental illness or mental health of a historical person is centrally a natural phenomenon, not a historical event (PE: 93 [111]).⁷ It is in other words a caused occurrence, not an action the motivations of which can be understood, even if motivations play a role in the onset or management of the illness and even if it may in turn explain historical events. Mental illness is not a human action; it is something that happens to us, even when it results from something we do. Both the modern insistence on it being an illness and the older ways of speaking of madness as possession or lunacy indicate it nevertheless is something that needs to be resisted.

Stein mentions Iphigenia as an example of one who successfully resists mental illness in the face of events conducive to provoking it.⁸ In the plays by Euripides (she refers to a reworking by Goethe of *Iphigenia in Tauris*), Iphigenia was sacrificed by her father Agamemnon to Artemis, then rescued and abducted by the goddess to be her priestess, and finally, many years later, fleeing together with her brother matricide, whom she would have been bound to sacrifice had she not fled. In choosing to live and forgive, in choosing to tell the truth and trust in the goodness of the gods, she displays heroic virtue in the mastering of negative feelings by which she could otherwise have been overcome (horror, dread, hurt, sorrow, loneliness). Had she sacrificed her brother knowingly, she would have committed the same crime against him as was earlier committed against her and would thereby have consummated the curse upon their house. She would have confirmed the tragic meaninglessness of her own sufferings and actions, which might indeed so have assaulted her psyche that a breakdown would result, as tragedy did in the case of

⁶'These considerations lead us to the conclusion that the spiritual subject is essentially subject to rational laws and that its experiences are intelligibly related' (PE: 97). The World Health Organisation gives the following definition of human wellness, of which mental health is an aspect (in *Strengthening mental health promotion*, Geneva, WHO 2001, Fact Sheet, no 220): human wellness 'in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.' I take this characterisation to be very close to the one proposed above.

⁷Stein's distinction between mental derangement and psychic illness proper is discussed in Sect. 3 below. If one were to count derangement in her sense as mental illness, one would have to say mental illness would be a historical event to the extent that it is motivated.

⁸'Faced with the choice whether to save her brother, his friend, and herself through lies and deceit or to abandon all of them to ruin, she first believes that she must chose the "lesser evil." But her pure soul is not able to bear untruthfulness and breach of trust; she defends herself against these as does a healthy nature against germs of fatal disease.' *Spirituality of the Christian Woman* in *Woman*, transl. F.M. Oben, CWES vol. II, 91. The brother, having murdered their mother, is also characterised as 'defiled by matricide, agonized by remorse to the point of madness.' *Ibid*.

Oedipus. Apart from Iphigenia, Our Lady is mentioned as a prototype of health, noting that her humility and faith sheltered her from the assaults on her psyche, which the extraordinary and, to a non-believing view, tragic events of her life, would have constituted.⁹

In the more popular writings Stein frequently refers to the 'contemporary sickness', 'illnesses of our times', 'social illnesses' and 'illnesses of our people'.¹⁰ The question is whether she by this means that those times or social environments are more conducive to provoking mental illness in individuals or that the times and environments themselves are ill in a way that is analogous to mental illness. As she regards psychic causality to be transmissible from person to person through sentient contagion, the answer is probably: both.

The illness afflicting her people in 1932 is portrayed in the following manner:

There is an inner disunion, a complete deficiency of a set of convictions and strong principles, an aimless drifting. Therefore, the great mass of humanity seeks for an anaesthetic in ever new, ever more refined delights. Those who wish to maintain a sober level of life, in order to protect themselves from contemporary turmoil, frequently annihilate this level by one-sided professional work; but even they cannot do anything to escape the turmoil. Only whole human beings as we have described them are immune to the contemporary sickness: such beings are steadfast on eternal first principles, unperturbed in their views and in their actions by the changing modes of thoughts, follies, and depravities surrounding them.¹¹

Would such social illness also be a caused occurrence and not a historical event in the same way as mental illness is? It clearly involves some level of individual responsibility, but only for what Hannah Arendt would call 'banal' things: being superficial, being inconsistent, or being one-sided in one's commitment. The inner fragmentation in the masses, which is unsupportive of individual responsibility and a conductor for sentient contagion is reinforced by events that assault the social mechanisms¹² established to support community in the same way as mental and physical illness result from systemic assaults on the psychic mechanisms supporting the person. The spiritual reality of community is supported on the one hand by associational structures by which human beings organise themselves; and on the other by the herd instinct, parallel to and caused by the psychic mechanism of sentient contagion. That mechanisms supporting the spiritual reality of the human community forms part of it reflects the fact that human beings are not pure spirits, but have their spiritual life supported both by what they create themselves and by a psychic

⁹ *Die Frau*, ESGA 13:182.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 'Krankheit unserer Zeit' xii, 7, 13, 74, 79, 245. 'unseres Volkes' 7: Iphigenia withstands madness 83, illnesses are of the whole human being 100, comes from original sin 168, 214. Edith Stein: *Bildung und Entfaltung der Individualität*, ESGA 16: Social illness 23; illnesses of our times 124. *Woman* CWES 2 is not an accurate reflection of ESGA 13. The latter includes more material and arranges it chronologically. CWES 2 is a translation of a previous edition, *Edith Steins Werke* (ESW) vol. V.

¹¹ 'Woman's Value in National Life' in *Woman*, CWES vol. II, 259–60 [7].

¹² Social causality seems to be the formal object of the social sciences. It would be the topic of another paper to analyse PPH's contribution towards its clarification.

and biological life also on the intersubjective, social level.¹³ The social functions of institutions, established in purpose-built buildings and regulated by customs and law are all socially constructed 'mechanisms', but not for that less the real infrastructure of culture. When natural or historical events destroy the functionality of these abruptly or over a period of time without allowing new institutions, buildings and customs to arise from the remnants of the old, then the community is attacked in the functionality that supports it. This attack may well come from well-meaning individuals within it, who desire to break with old traditions, perceived as oppressive. But the limited life power available to the community from its members, no matter how positively engaged these would be for the community, and no matter how severely threatened by an outside enemy they are, does not allow it to reinvent its functionality instantaneously. Such re-emergence takes time and a concerted effort that is only possible when new operational modes have established themselves by being recognised by the members. The community is thus exposed, in its reduction to a mass, to a severe shortage of life power – all that power, namely, it would take to (re-)create its supportive functionality instantaneously. Its functionality shattered, the community's channelling of the available life power according to a vision of the common good no longer obtains. Compensation mechanisms (dictatorships, scapegoat campaigns and pursuit of particular interests falling back on the remaining social mechanism of herd mentality operational through sentient contagion) kick in, until such time as the community gets the time and leadership needed to rebuild itself. Mental and social illnesses thus are thus both analogous and related phenomena, according to Stein, in that they both rely on psychic causality as the medium through which they are provoked – and healed.

In what follows, we shall first look more in depth at Stein's understanding of the psyche as a whole and as a unity (1) in order to establish its plausibility. Then, we shall look at three aspects of the mechanism of the psyche supportive of normal spiritual activity in human beings mentioned by her: vitality, rationality, and trust (2). The phenomena of mental illness seem all to have in common that in them these three aspects of the psychic mechanism are compromised through psychic causality. Finally, we shall look at the different possibilities for contracting mental illness through psychic contagion (3), and argue that this causal social dimension of mental illness further contributes to render plausible that the specific object studied by psychiatry is the disturbed psyche.

¹³ McEelligott 2013 explains the failure of the Weimar Republic as a crisis in the understanding of leadership, eventually resulting in a cult of the 'Führer'. Benson 1908 gives a dystopian description of such an assault and its consequences for the experience of the individuals.

1 The Psyche as a Whole and as a Unity

Stein sees the psyche as a series of connections – a ‘*Zusammenhang*’ – constituted from every act experienced as marked by psychic causality or life power. What the psyche connects is the spiritual world of values motivating the person and the natural world of causality, since the motivating power of the values is experienced as enlivening or draining and as lending itself to be realised in the world by action. The psyche is thus distinct from the spirit, which is sheer motivation and which, in contrast with the psyche, cannot be causally influenced. In the same way, the personal subject of motivation who experiences meaning is distinct from the psycho-physical individual, which as ‘the real sentient subject is constituted on the basis of causal relationships’.¹⁴ In the case of psycho-physical persons, like human beings, the personal subject *has* a psyche, a soul and a body. But the psycho-physical person cannot be reduced to its psyche, soul or body, and it is the *person* that has them and is the bearer of them.¹⁵

Having a psyche is specific to psycho-physical individuals. Animals other than human beings also have a psyche, but pure spirits would have none. Accordingly, there is animal psychology, but there would be no angelic psychology, nor indeed a psychology of God: Persons are not necessarily psycho-physical individuals.¹⁶ Only individuals, who have a psyche, can experience mental health or illness.

Psycho-physical individuals like human beings experience what they experience in ways that involve life-power, i.e. through the psyche. They also experience motivating powers in ways that affect the psyche: feelings, in particular, available in principle also to pure spirits as the simple feeling of value, are experienced by us as accompanied by psycho-physical manifestations (e.g. the beating of the heart, the constriction of the throat, the blood rising to the face). Only as a limit experience can we ‘feel’ like the angels do: have insight into the motivating power that the value is, without any emotional psycho-physical accompaniment. This insight, however, is what we must rely on to be rational; it is sustained by reflection and thought. A rational assessment of our feelings is necessary because the psycho-physical feel of the feelings can be mistaken for the value-feelings they accompany, and can be transmitted through sentient contagion, without connection in the person affected to the value having motivated it through the personal structure in the transmitter. The affected person may, because of this transmission, constitute a sham character in himself from feelings that only masquerades as his own. In this way, we can be distracted by our feelings away from the motivating power of the values and mistake the object of our emotional reactions in a way pure spirits cannot.

¹⁴ PPH: 77. *An Investigation concerning the State*, CWES 10: 46: ‘Spontaneous acts are free mental deeds, and we call the subject of such deeds a person.’ The distinction between the psycho-physical individual and the spiritual person is reflected in the division of Chaps. 3 and 4 of PE.

¹⁵ See note 18.

¹⁶ PPH: 74: ‘a consciousness is conceivable in which the entire “conditioning” stratum would be missing, a consciousness that would unfold without any fluctuation of “aliveness” and that would also allow acts to devolve out of itself.’

As said, the psyche displays similarities with a reservoir or a battery that can be filled or charged by rest and emptied or discharged by activity: life-power being the medium that is filling/charging or emptying/discharging. Whereas all experiences use up some amount of life power, positive experiences seem to use less and appear even to contribute to replenish the energy reservoir, whereas negative experiences consume more and seem sometimes to drain the power reservoir entirely. This seems to be because motivational energy (whether positive or negative) contributes to or consumes life power when experienced emotionally. It is the psychic causality intrinsic to the emotions that has this impact, whereas the ‘value-feeling’ may be had also when there is not enough energy available to even experience the emotion or when the value is considered as a pure possibility. This latter amounts to an estimative, intuitive knowledge of the value’s motivating power, whereas the former is the effect this feeling of value makes on the medium of the psyche through which it is felt in psycho-physical individuals.

The motivational or spiritual energy resulting from the live experience of motivational power in the psyche seeks ‘unloading’ in bodily feelings, expressions and thought, all of which are ‘products’ of the psyche, i.e. brought forth in its medium and experienced as both motivated (meaningful) and embedded in the causal network of nature (i.e. transcendently manifesting in the world or in experience).¹⁷ In pure spirits, as in God, spiritual energy would motivate without affecting a psyche and without psychic expression: a purely spiritual person would not be subject to any charge induced by psycho-physical causality, it cannot be out of its mind with fright or seduced by the pleasures of the senses. It is because our psyche is the medium through which we experience meaning and is affected causally, also by what we experience spiritually, that we can be mentally well or ill.

From the psyche being a ‘*Zusammenhang*’ it does not necessarily follow that we experience the psyche as one or indeed as our own exclusively. It seems in fact that disturbances may arise from experiences of some foreign experience ‘having lodged itself in’ or, more precisely, being mistaken for ours. We can know such apparent lodging is a mistaken attribution because the psyche is necessarily or *a priori* one with the unity of the I since what constitutes it is experiential causality, a feature directly or primordially experienced by the I in its own experiences. The I *does* experience foreign experience non-primordially through empathy, however, and therefore also ‘vicariously’ experience the life power experienced by someone else in his or her experience. Empathy remains vicarious, though, it is an experience of experience, which is not mine.

¹⁷ ‘Obviously we have to distinguish between “natural” [“*natürliches*”] life and life flowing in from without, which we call “mental” since it is acquired in mental acts. Yet even without this “influx”, it seems you have to separate a “sensory” [“*sinnliches*”] and a “mental” [“*geistiges*”] stratum, and correspondingly a sensory and a mental lifepower, as different roots of the psyche. With sensory lifepower, the psyche appears to be sunk into the *physis*: into bodiliness and, moreover, by means of bodiliness into material nature. [...] Mental lifepower appears to be determined by sensory lifepower: as a rule mental vigour also fades along with bodily vigour. Yet aside from that, mental lifepower remains open to influxes from the object world and through them can become capable of achievements which don’t accord with the state of sensory lifepower.’ (PPH: 81 [71])

In contrast with empathy and sentient contagion (which we shall treat further in 3) stands the experience resulting from unification with others: communal experience; in its highest intensity, love (PPH: 270). In unification, the I opens itself up to a physical, psychic and/or spiritual union with another, that leaves it open to experience the most intimate stirrings of the soul of the other if this other has opened him or herself also to the first. The personality may adapt to the other for his or her sake, but the consummated unification presupposes an 'original inner commonality. Where that is missing, you can't achieve any community of life, even through the most severe inclination to unite' (PPH: 271).

Although unification in essence is a free act and thus essentially spiritual, one can be lured into pseudo-unification under conditions of seduction or confusion. Particularly through sexual intercourse, which may be taken to be an expression of spiritual unification and tends to accomplish a sharing of life power. We speak of sexual abuse of children or of legal minors because their consent to intercourse has been lured out of them without legitimate expectation that they know what it entails. The psychological risk is that they would open themselves to psychological manipulation, as the repression of a mixture of transferred guilt and shame, whether intended by the abuser or not, would give rise to a series of confusing psychological symptoms keeping them in his or her power. To see through this illusion and arrive at reconstituting psychological integrity can take many years. Normal adults too may mistake seductive manipulation for love and compromise their psychological integrity in this way. But they are better equipped to trace the origin of experiences and hence distinguish between their own psychic life, that of someone else, and that which someone else might want them to believe they experience. If, however, early compromises have never been fully understood, they could be reiterated as part of a desire to come to understand them, and in this way the abused could, tragically, turn into an abuser.

Addictions, of which psychopathic manipulation might be a particular vampire-like one, feeding off the confused subjection of their victims to their manipulative ministrations, arise from unsustainable life power consuming activities, the cessation of which requires a transformation of character for which life power, because of the addiction, is not available through the sentient network. They take many forms but have in common that they attempt to fill up the energy reservoir of the psyche through goods or experiences of insufficient value while the effort involved in acquiring or performing these deplete the psyche completely. Addictions represent and illustrate bad management of the psychic economy and are reflected in a personal character problem. The trap in which they shut the individual can be escaped only through activation of the spirit, through motivation by higher values placed above those for the sake of which the addiction has been contracted.

The struggle for psychic unity is in general won through the acting person preferring higher values to lower ones. This allows a person to live out of the depth of his or her soul – the psyche in its unity – possessing the three enduring characteristics of purity, nobility, and kindness (PPH: 231). The depth dimension of the soul, its interiority where these qualities are preserved and from where they radiate, is the reason why preference of values is of personal importance. The soul's depth

dimension would atrophy were it not vaulted by the personality's preference for higher values, and the I would be reduced to its superficial 'self' – the pure I, which has no depth. Whereas this would make the person shallow and would cover up the permanent qualities of the soul, it would not, however, make him or her mentally ill. The 'soullessness' would nevertheless signal an increased risk of social illnesses being contracted in the environment, as the person by the fact of his lack of depth would be susceptible to sentient contagion and incapable of community, not responding to the higher values and not being united to others by the life of his soul.

In sum: to Stein the psyche, although a field of conversion of spiritual energy to physical energy and of consumption of mental energy in spiritual experience, is *a priori* unified by its pertaining to an I. This I, who in its relation to the spiritual world is a person, can protect the depth dimension of the soul, opened up by the person's response to higher values and ought to do that in order to be immune to social illnesses and consequent compromises to its psychic integrity. In psychic illness, it is the conversion field of the psyche that is specifically affected in its ability to support meaningful experience.

2 Three Aspects of the Mechanism of the Psyche Supportive of Normal Spiritual Activity in Human Beings

When using the expression 'psychic mechanism', Stein refers to the elements of experience that seem to run their course 'before our eyes like an external event' (PPH: 103). In contrast, spiritual acts are motivated, and we cannot understand or empathise experience unless in relation to what motivates it. We can, however, take notice of causation in relation to experience, as something with which it contrasts, but which nevertheless forms part of it, and this is what we do as we identify the psyche. The whole psyche has, in its connection with spiritual acts, the character of a 'mechanism': psychic causality operates throughout it as that which defines it. 'The total sensate causal occurrence may be construed as a conversion of lifepower into active experiencing, and as a utilisation of lifepower by active experiencing' (PPH: 27). 'A sensate event is a conversion of lifepower into active experiencing' (PPH: 190).¹⁸ Because of the transcendence of the psyche new things can be discovered about the operation of its mechanisms by the individual and by the scientific community.

The psyche is, by its essence and in contrast with the spirit, experienced as limited, since it manifests itself as the reason for our experience potentially cutting out. Its operations while we are conscious are often not noticed at all, and identifying them at all as distinct from spiritual activity demands sustained attention. The lack of life power, in contrast, we cannot help but notice, since it is experienced in ways we learn to interpret with the help of others as warning signals of an impending

¹⁸Note that the translator translates 'psychisch' with 'sentient'.

breakdown. Being faint from hunger, lack of sleep or illness, experiencing meaninglessness, tiredness of performing some particular action, emotional over-stimulation or depression are all different ways in which we experience the lack of life power in a particular form. To avoid being caught in a negative spiral – since the motivating power of all of these experiential components is negative – we turn our minds, when we suffer from them, towards that from which we can get energy if we cannot get the rest, food, meaningful or positive experiences we need. The discovery of higher values, whose motivating power can enliven us even when we are depleted, finds its occasion here. The denial of the psyche's limitation may also be a strategy in the face of depletion, often accompanied by unconscious (compensation) mechanisms that source the energy in ways that are ultimately destructive. The most effective management of psychic energy is the one that has a clear view of the actual state of the psyche, supports it through the sustainable activities of the virtues through which the higher motivating powers are accessed and has no recourse to compensation mechanisms.

The rhythm of the psychic processes is in equilibrium when the psyche functions as a clear medium for meaningful psycho-spiritual life and experience, drawing minimal attention to itself. In this state it protects its integrity by tending to allow for the emotional feeling of moderately positive values, since these do not upset this equilibrium. The feeling of extremely positive or extremely negative values may equally upset it, so these seem to be felt emotionally by us only when we are somewhat out of sorts. The mechanism towards equilibrium is one the person can learn to assist, but may also purposefully break experimentally in order to feel the sublime and the horrendous. When the equilibrium is disturbed, whether purposefully or not, by depletion from the feeling of extremely powerful feelings, the psyche is overwhelmed, and no longer enables the person to 'make sense of' what happens. The causal factors which then surface in their raw state manifest themselves as symptoms, as do indeed the compensation mechanisms they deploy. All of these can, given knowledge of the psyche, be interpreted and assist the subject suffering from the distortion of experience in regaining healthy, meaningful experience and stop the operation of compensation mechanisms. That is, of course, if the person is interested in that. Some prefer the highs and lows of an unstable condition, perhaps because they employ them in the service of art or think life is boring without them.

Stein identifies three types of mental pathology, which may be linked in a concrete subject but nevertheless are distinguishable. The first of these is derangement, which insists on and attempts to realise what is impossible, for the sake of its value alone. This is an anomaly of the spirit, not of the psyche, and it could therefore characterise the acts of pure spirits as well as of human beings. Whereas it may provoke psychic illness in human beings, it is not itself a disorder of the psyche, since it is not due to psychic causality but exists simply in spiritual acts. The second type of mental pathology is psychic illnesses properly speaking, where spiritual intelligibility is preserved, but transposed by altered psychic states causally induced, and thus not understandable without a causal key to the interpretation of the

symptoms. The third type of mental pathology is 'breakdowns', where even the symptoms are understandable as rationally motivated by events.¹⁹

Derangement may well accompany and induce mental illness, but as a spiritual anomaly it can also exist in persons who do not exhibit any of the symptoms we associate with mental illness. When the negative value of deranged acts and persons is felt emotionally, the causal impact of this feeling may constitute a challenge to the mental health of the deranged or of others, depending on the height of the value for the sake of which the derangement is effectuated. If the value is noble, the deranged person also will be, and will constitute less of a threat to himself or others. If the value is low, the deranged person will constitute a threat, unless he or those surrounding him have rendered themselves insensitive at the cost of superficiality, which in turn would constitute a risk for contraction and transmission of sentient contagion. The causal momentum may, in severe cases assisted by contagion, be transferred by projection and attributed to other individuals, who then are made to serve as scapegoats. Such deranged contagious transfers may, under social conditions marked by superficiality, be undertaken to deliberately call forth a psychic breakdown in others. Breakdowns caused in this way would pertain to the third type of mental pathologies mentioned by Stein: they would be understandable both in what caused them and in its effect. While the normal functioning of the psyche is of value, it is not a value it may not be reasonable to subordinate to other values: Deliberately inducing a mental breakdown in another is, for example, of lower value than suffering one. Derangement with preference for lower values is also of lower value than mental illness properly speaking, and it would thus be rational to prefer the latter to the former.

Stein mentions three ways in which the mechanism of the psyche supports normal psycho-spiritual activity. First, its rhythmic regularity supports and equilibrates the vitality of the individual. Second, this vitality enables the individual to be rational and not be overtaken by subconscious motivations, prejudices and contagion. Thirdly, rationality allows the person to think and evaluate situations objectively, and thereby affords the individual natural trust in those matters into which it gains insight. If either of these is compromised, the other two may compensate, with a

¹⁹ 'Rationally, one can will only the possible. But there are irrational people who do not care whether what they have recognised as valuable is realisable or not. They will it for its value alone, attempting to make the impossible possible. Pathological psychic life indicates that what is contradictory to rational laws is really possible for many people. We call this mental derangement. Moreover, psychic lawfulness can here be completely intact. On the other hand, in some psychic illnesses rational laws of the spirit remain completely intact, for example in anaesthesia, aphasia, etc. We recognise a radical difference between spiritual and psychic anomalies. In cases of the second kind, the intelligibility of foreign psychic life is completely undisturbed; we must only empathise changed causal relationships. However, in mental illness we can no longer understand because we can only empathise a causal sequence separately and not a meaningful proceeding of experiences. Finally, there is still a series of pathological cases in which neither the psychic mechanism nor rational lawfulness seems to be severed. Rather, these cases are experiential modifications of the frame of rational laws, for example, depression following a catastrophic event. Not only is the portion of the psychic life spared by the illness intelligible here, but also the pathological symptom itself.' PE: 97.

resulting strain on the remaining two. In the opposite direction, the psyche can also be strengthened by conscious, insightful effort, by a regular, well-balanced life, by living sensibly in accordance with insight and by trusting that everything and all manner of things shall be well.

Vitality is the result or manifestation of the fundamental and characteristic ability of the psyche to charge and discharge, replenish and spend energy by a cycle of sleep, activity, nourishment and relaxation. If this mechanism is compromised by depletion, or deprivation of sensual or intellectual stimuli, the ability to identify or constitute things weakens and a state of wake dreaming or conditioned fantasising sets in, as the mind has insufficient or too much unspent lifepower to constitute, understand and interpret its experience adequately. This insufficiently constituted or overly re-constituted experience may display patterns of underlying impulses or structures, the origin of which cannot be determined with accuracy. These patterns might be seen, along Jungian lines, as archetypal symbols focusing projections like metal rods channel a current in an electric field.²⁰ It is conceivable that megalomania and paranoia refer to typical patterns of interpretation of causally distorted experience. It is also conceivable that alternating states of depression and hyperactivity can result from the basic rhythm of the psyche being pushed in its resting into apathy and in its spending of mental energy into frenzied activity and that both conditions would have a tendency to reinforce one another such that the cycle would be difficult to break. The economy of the psyche, although open to the spirit, is not by nature spiritual. It is an economy all living, conscious beings experience in their experience, and it can be compromised in all of them for similar reasons. Animals, however, do not loose their mind exactly, having none quite to loose, but they do experience trauma from exhaustion or cruel treatment and depression if it is prolonged. In humans, however, the story behind sleeplessness, alcoholism, anorexia or obsessive-compulsive behaviour is experienced in terms of its spiritual content.

Rationality is sustained when the psyche has sufficient vitality for identifying things objectively and for acting in consequence thereof. It relies on a high level of alertness, capacity for concentration, and emotional detachment, all of which makes the rational person vulnerable to extreme tiredness and strong emotions, as both challenge the ability to constitute things as they are according to themselves, independently of personal interests, emotions or desires.

If vitality is so compromised that the experience of objectivity breaks down, then rationality also breaks down, as the ability to identify premises and reason from them to conclusions or correctly identify acts and reason from them to their motivating power therewith ceases to function consistently. Rationality is the ability to follow motivated sequences stepwise, to conclude from something meaningful to its implications, whether to how it arose or to what it will occasion. The clearheaded healthy individual is not susceptible to let unconscious motives rule his or her actions, or even to mistake the motivating powers motivating a feeling, a gesture or an act for apparent ones in others. The rational individual has insight into the

²⁰ PPH: I, IV.

motivating powers and consciously chose between them, in such a way as to be able to account for his choices. The rational person can therefore be responsible.

Irrationality, in contrast, because of its low level of motivatedness, is compatible with high levels of associative imagination and psychic contagion, such that it allows for superstition, prejudice and 'group-think'. It may masquerade as creativity, but in fact it is without objective meaning-content. This may appear fine to the one whose psyche is depleted and whose experience as a consequence is distorted. He does not have the energy to care about accuracy in details or clearly justifiable motives for constitution. This is how a collective dream state can replace objectivity in a community reduced to a mass.

Existential trust is the person's acceptance of the limitations of his psyche, such that he rests in taking what comes without succumbing to either anxiety or self-delusion. It is linked to the experience of 'resting in God', which already the non-believing Stein recognised as the muster for recharging the battery of the psyche. It allows for vitality since it conserves rather than spends energy and thus also sustains rationality. Anguish, in contrast, is very high in energy consumption, also in its less debilitating varieties of anxiety and worry.²¹ It frequently impacts vitality and sometimes rationality, although it does not prevent the naked value-feeling, just the enjoyment of its positive emotional impact. Compared to trust, which abides by the meaning of things and sustains our interest in them, anguish is an upsetting and debilitating flight from the meaning of things as it recedes.

Together, vitality, rationality and trust sustain the normal psycho-spiritual experience of human beings, such that it is experienced as meaningful.²² To the extent that their opposite qualities gain the upper hand, mental illness results. Preventing or stopping this from happening is thus the task involved in preserving or regaining mental health. The diet of the monasteries: a regular, sober life in community, uncompromising virtue and trusting God in everything proposes the ideal, which Stein in fact herself chose. Such a diet equilibrates, channels and preserves life power and thus prevents its depletion, but it is not chosen for the sake of mental health, nor indeed is it a means towards it if chosen for the sake of it. Preferring mental health to higher things is not conducive towards it.

Understanding it, helping others to achieve it and alleviating their suffering from it is, however, a higher thing: the vocation of the psychiatrist. The means at his disposition are medication, often used to regulate the rhythm of the psyche and stop the colossal energy expenditure associated with anxiety; counselling, psycho-analysis and cognitive therapy, sometimes delegated to psychologists and mostly helping

²¹ 'Anxiety, to be sure, is under ordinary circumstances not the dominant mood of human life. It overshadows everything else only under pathological conditions, while normally we go through life almost as securely as if we had a really firm grip on our existence.' (*Finite and Eternal Being*, CWES 9: 59/ *Endliches und ewiges Sein*, ESGA 11-12: 59). See also Stein's treatment of Heidegger's concept of anguish in the appendix to *Finite and Eternal Being*, at the present available in English translation only in a separate translation (Lebeck 2007).

²² A study of how these three aspects are affected in the various psychiatric diagnoses would be too involved for the present study, which only aims to outline the way the psychic mechanism is compromised in mental illness in general.

sufferers to understand how the psyche works in relation to the spirit and what can be done differently to prevent suffering; and finally referral to other professionals, such as priests or spiritual practitioners, whose insight is believed to be of benefit to the patient in his recovery. All of these are healing in so far as they sustain vitality, assist rationality and support trust, in short: help the patient to work himself back to health by means of psychic causality.

3 Sentient Contagion and Mental Illness

Whereas psychic energy can be employed in many ways, motivational energy is in contrast directional: it is power to spend in a particular way on a certain type of action. Motivational energy is understood in terms of the values, which are the motivating powers 'behind' it, explaining it. We do not accept all motivating powers as 'ours' by allowing them to motivate us and thus we talk about 'my' values or 'our' values as those that we 'have', which we allow 'into' us as what motivates us in our attempt to realise them. We can also be affected through psychic causality by values that are not ours. This happens mainly through psychic contagion, whether with real or represented emotion, and the closing of oneself to it is different from the closing of oneself to a motivating power, as this latter is accomplished simply by preferring something else to it, whereas the former involves closing oneself to a causal impact already experienced, by deflecting it internally. Stein says the following about this free ability to close oneself off against unwanted influences:

... the individual person [...] has the freedom to nip in the bud any stirrings of the soul that are induced within her. That goes for stirrings that are merely transferred (an anger or an ardour that she has acquired through mere contagion, without having apprehended any corresponding value or disvalue), as well as those that are adequately motivated (a hate, perhaps, that is well founded in the individual distinctiveness of what is hated). In this way she can work against the impact of the surroundings upon the development of her properties and perhaps suspend it entirely (PPH: 268-9).

Psychic contagion takes the form of an instinctive imitation of movements, expressions or psychic states that may import contents to which a genuine personal value response can also arise.²³ It remains that the contents are imported, without

²³ PPH: 182-6. Stein concludes her discussion of the three ways in which instinctive imitation operates with the following consideration: "The foregoing considerations have taught us that there is such a thing as an impact of one sentient individual upon another [even] when no mental functioning of any kind is in play. What this makes possible is a modification of the behaviour of one individual under the influence of another, a conformity in behaviour of a series of individuals who mutually influence one another, and finally an intermeshing of functionalities of different individuals which serves objectively one purpose. What is not possible without mental activation is any stance-taking of the individuals to one another, any consensus or any methodical cooperation with it, and finally any collective behaviour in the genuine sense. The collectivity of behaviour includes an experiencing as a collective experiencing: and this "experiencing as" is itself a mental functioning.' (PPH: 187).

the person having specifically and consciously adopted the values to which the imported psychic energy is a motivated response, refracted through the personality who originally felt them. Deflecting the foreign psychic energy before it gets to affect (or 'infect') the psyche causally involves a realisation of the automatic nature of the imitation, and with it of the foreign source of the emotional content. In so far as one cannot share the transmitted content personally, i.e. as a response to values one can hold as one's own, then one can wilfully deflect or eject the content out of the psyche, as an irrelevant foreign element, which has no place in and no meaning for me.

Through the phenomenon of psychic contagion it is possible to understand how one psycho-physical person can appear to 'possess' another. As an emphatic personality expresses his feelings to an impressionable one, the latter, being impressed with the contents transmitted through instinctive imitation/psychic contagion, mistakenly takes these to be his own, without himself having performed the value response from which they originated. If the impressed person is happy with his resulting pseudo-personality and the suspension of responsibility it entails, it will take longer for reflection on his experience to enable him to realise the suspension of his personality. If not, the feeling of being not quite himself will make the sufferer learn to see through the mechanics of the contagion in proportion to his desire for authenticity and freedom.

However, Stein does not exclude the possibility of a more direct and powerful possession, which does not involve the phenomenon of psychic contagion, and which is attributable solely to a spiritual subject.²⁴ That the body and the psyche can be possessed (and that my body and my psyche must be possessed by me if I am to be fully myself) forms part of the natural economy of psycho-physical individuals: it forms part of human nature, and is not by itself a sign of our fallen state. To realise personal freedom, however, the person must learn to shut him or herself off against unwanted influences, to be immune to sentient contagion and to actively strive towards self-possession through the acquisition of virtue. For help in this it can enlist the succour of other persons, whether human, angelic or divine: Self-possession is ultimately a gift from God.

²⁴ 'Die Persönlichkeit ist aber nicht auf den Leib beschränkt und auch nicht so an ihn gebunden, daß an allem, woran der Leib beteiligt ist, auch die Persönlichkeit beteiligt sein müßte. Nehmen wir das Phänomen der „Besessenheit“: wenn ein Mönch in der Kirche zu toben und den Heiligtümern zu fluchen beginnt, so werden diese Äußerungen von den Gläubigen nicht ihm, sondern dem Teufel zugeschrieben, der von ihm Besitz ergriffen hat. Daß es derselbe Leib ist, mit dem man es zu tun hat, besagt noch nicht, daß die handelnde Persönlichkeit dieselbe ist. Diese bekommt man also mit Hilfe der Raum- und Zeitstelle, die den Leib bestimmen, nicht zu fassen. Wer das Beispiel nicht schlagend findet, weil er nicht an den Teufel glaubt, den möchten wir an die Fälle erinnern, wo man von „Unzurechnungsfähigkeit“ spricht. Ob man die Handlungen eines Trunkenen oder Geisteskranken einem bösen Geist zuschreibt oder auf einen anormalen Zustand zurückführt – auf jeden Fall nimmt man an, daß die Persönlichkeit des Menschen an seinem Verhalten nicht beteiligt ist. Und damit ist zugegeben, worauf es uns ankommt: daß die Individualität einer Person auf andere Weise als durch die Raum- und Zeitstelle ihres Leibes bestimmt werden muß.' *Einführung in der Philosophie*, ESGA 8: 203. The translation of *Einführung* is under preparation by Antonio Calcagno.

4 Conclusion

To Stein the proper object of psychology is the psyche, constituted from all the elements of experience in which life power plays a role. In so far as psychic illness affects the psyche specifically (not the spirit, although this might suffer derangement, and not the soul, although it may be at stake), the proper object studied by psychiatry would be the disturbances that affect the psyche, in whatever way and for whatever reason they occur. To Stein the mechanism of the psyche operates centrally in three central psycho-spiritual functions that support meaningful experiencing. These – vitality, rationality and trust – are characteristically compromised in mental illness. As functions they are compromised through psychic causality affecting the psyche in three ways: through emotions, through psychic contagion or through the body. The healing of the psyche happens in the opposite direction, but by the same means: through psychic causality channelled through spiritual acts (which is why both the practice of virtue, cognitive therapy and meditation can be helpful); through a supportive environment (the help of friends and family) or through the support provided by medication. Possibly the most effective treatment includes all three, but each can contribute to accomplish the task separately.

In so far as this is the case, psychiatry is not a natural science any more than psychology is. Its object of study is the dysfunctional psyche, i.e. the one that does not support meaningful experience. Nor can psychiatry be reduced to a spiritual practice, since the disturbances occur as a result of the mechanisms of the psyche having been affected.

Reductionist psychiatric approaches, whether they regard their object to pertain to nature or to spirit exclusively, significantly and needlessly add to the sufferings of the mentally ill. It would constitute great progress for the psychiatric profession and for psychiatry as a science if this were to be no longer the case.

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